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ABSTRACT

The French department, commonly viewed by chairmen and faculty as the conveyor of culture, is admonished to revamp its curriculum and attempt to embrace a broader, more humane understanding of the nature of culture. With the traditional, belletristic, college French curriculum having been rejected in favor of programs based on "cogency, cohesion, and conscience," the author offers his views on the interrelatedness of language, literature, and civilization, deprecating the attitude that would make language and civilization courses handmaidens to the study of literature. He urges the use of electronic media, essential to the maintenance of language skills and to the development of interest in the language. Much of the paper is devoted to description of a proposed "Institut d'Etudes Francaises," and elaborates on the type of interdisciplinary programs in French currently being offered at the University of Illinois (Urbana). A partial list of courses in "things French" for 1970-71 is contained in the appendix. (RL)

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A Modern Curriculum in French Studies

by Robert J. Nelson

I

French, as we all know, is the language of Culture. Culture, if we are to base our definition on the curricula of most contemporary Departments of French, is French Literature--especially French poetry, drama, fiction and prose of the personal essay. "French" for these curricula is the icing on the cake of culture, the pièce de résistance of the finishing school in all things not visibly practical. In American society, this structuring of French department curricula says, let the men live in the "real" world of "savoir-faire" and "laisser-faire"; let their women devote themselves to pure "savoir" and "laisser-aller". For many a modern French Department, French is a school subject in which refined ladies learn to talk about books in an elegant tongue having little to do with the world of men.

Not surprisingly, then, most contemporary French Departments are primarily truncated Departments of Comparative Literature. They teach the language "at the lower levels" in order to prepare students for the reading of French Literature, usually masterpieces in belles-lettres. This reading is related as much as possible to the students' (and teachers') experience of other literatures. In the nature of things, this means chiefly English and American literature, although other literatures become accessible for the purpose (largely through translations into English). This "literary imperative" structures the lower curricular levels as well as the higher, since adaptations (often: dilutions) of the masterpieces make up the "motivating content" for the learning of the language-qua-language.

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Life in the second half of the twentieth century makes this single curricular imperative at once unnecessary and potentially harmful both to the understanding of French culture and to the personal development of the student. Sputnik, Telstar, the jumbo jet, the growth of knowledge, particularly of "sciences humaines"--such forces call for the widening of horizons in foreign language education. They call attention to the possibility of careers using "French and French Culture" beyond the academy; they underscore the possibility for a richer, more subtly and diversely informed study of French belles-lettres themselves.

Now, on this latter point, some might argue that the study of French Literature really belongs in a broader curricular setting formalizing the comparatist assumptions underlying its study to date. Many American universities have, in fact, moved in the direction of Departments of "Foreign and Comparative Literature" (e.g. Rochester) or simply of "Literature" (UC--San Diego) or have created loosely structured graduate programs calling for substantial comparisons between developments in French and other literatures (SUNY--Buffalo). These broadened horizons within the study of literature itself are to be welcomed. Yet, in view especially of the growth of electronic technology and astronautics, it would be ironical for a Modern Department of French to forsake its prime reason for being--its "Frenchness", so to speak--at the very moment when that reason has never known a greater justification. The opportunity to know French and the French is physically and economically feasible to a degree undreamed of as little as two decades ago. That the French language and French culture would be a useful as well as

a desirable object of study for an educated American has an even greater justification in the second half of the twentieth century than ever before. French thought, French culture shape the societies of many of the nations of the so-called "Third World." One wonders, for example, what the history of American relations with Southeast Asia might have been over the past decade had the study of "French" in schools and colleges been extended beyond the parameters of belles-lettres. Apart from frankly utilitarian justifications, the patrimony of French culture--in all its diversity--should be open to all who wish to turn to it. As new groups in our society begin to receive the advantages of longer and more sophisticated education, they, too, should have the continued opportunity to receive foreign language education in its integrity and uniqueness. It is, then, both untimely and unfair to subordinate the study of French and French Culture to some over-arching comparatism--whether that comparatism be in culture as understood by specialists in Literature or as understood in the social sciences, particularly Anthropology.

II

A Modern French Department should do as many "things French" as it can with cogency, cohesion and conscience. To call for a widening of horizons beyond the primarily literary does not mean a French Department has to become, in effect, a college within a college. It does not mean, for example, that French social science should be a little department unto itself. The same is true of language (and teacher-training therein), on the one hand, and, on

the other hand, of Literature (and teacher-training therein). No one area should be so air-tight that it offers one kind of a degree, while another area offers another kind of degree. Degrees taken in a Modern Department of French should be based on a program of courses selected from more than one curriculum area in such a way to provide that education most appropriate for the career in "things French" projected by the degree-candidate himself or herself. In every case this means a judicious "mix" of courses from the three major areas: Language, Literature, Civilization. Naturally, some students will take more courses from one area than another. For example, students in B.A.T. and M.A.T. programs are likely to select most of their courses from the curricula in Language and in Civilization. Nevertheless, the realities of secondary teaching dictate that there be at least one or two courses taken in the Literature Curriculum. This further dictates that the curriculum Policy Committee in Literature should consider the advisability of designing a course intended for B.A.T. and M.A.T. candidates, a course taking into account (a) their non-specialized interest in Literature as such, and (b) their probable limited experience of French Literature. Similarly, the Curriculum Policy Committee in Language will want to remember that most students--in any degree program in the Department--will not be interested in language in the highly technical way appropriate for students interested primarily in linguistics. I am sure that all teachers are aware of these factors and can accomodate to them in working out programs for individual students.

In working them out, it is time for the teacher to rely on modern technology in a truly modern way. For too long, technology has been thought of as (1) ancillary to the main charge of teaching the language and the culture; and (2) appropriate chiefly at the "base" of instruction, i.e., in the teaching of the "tool" of language itself. Both assumptions are invalid because they are so limiting. To be sure, electronic technology in particular (discs, tapes, film) is most helpful in helping to teach such matters as pronunciation or in presenting authentic images of the foreign culture to students in basic language courses. Yet, even at this level, these resources are primary rather than ancillary. Tape in particular (both audio and, soon, video) permit the learner to proceed at his own pace, to adapt his idiosyncratic learning patterns and goals to the materials. Tape (including rentable recorders) should thus be available on a "library" rather than a "laboratory" basis. Language laboratories reflect certain 19th-century pedagogical and sociological modes of thought--rote learning, simple input-output models of behavior, mechanistic mass-production concepts of achievement, etc. The language laboratory also probably owes much of its curious success to the anxious Humanist's envy of his colleagues in the hard sciences with their chem labs, physics labs, etc.

Useful as electronic technology is at the "base" of FL learning, it is even more so at the advanced and "post-requirement" level. Students with a relative mastery of the foreign language are simply unable to depend on the limited number of curricular

contact hours (in class or, to be unduly optimistic, in frequent consultation with faculty) to maintain and expand their command of the language and its culture. Nor can we depend on "study abroad" to do the job: it can amount, at most, to one-fourth of the time the student is in college. (Naturally, adding in the graduate school, the proportion is smaller--considerably so in the scandalously neglected teacher-training programs). For the remainder of the time, while he or she is in American setting, the student simply must have access to a living, current experience of the language and its culture. Radio, TV, movies provide this experience with a freshness, a scope and a variety that no formal curriculum can hope to provide.

These media do so naturally and casually, so to speak. We are unduly bent on setting up causal structures providing for an inhumane spiritual cost-accounting through courses, grades, etc. We must concentrate more on notions of community and, within the academy, on collegiality in planning structures permitting achievement in foreign-language education. Situations or conditions of learning are as important as "techniques" or "methods". Certainly, for those who have achieved a fair degree of mastery in the language itself, we must provide extra-curricular situations for maintainence of skills and further immersion in the culture. Thus, a decent foreign language center with a shortwave radio, a TV monitor (broadcasting foreign films or tapes) and a cinémathèque are not frills or indulgences--they are practical, professional necessities. In sum, if we are to

be truly cultured--which is to say, both humanely cultivated or civilized and, as the anthropologists say, acculturated--we must give up our nineteenth-century approach to twentieth-century imperatives in foreign-language education.

Now, there is a danger of letting the "medium" become the message. As our colleague, James W. Carey, Director of the Institute of Communications Research, points out in a brilliant article in a recent American Scholar (Spring 1970) electronic technology may not "re-tribalize" quite so much as Marshall McLuhan believes. Quite to the contrary, as Harold Innis feared, it might accelerate the process of homogenization which McLuhan believes characteristic of "print cultures." Yet, paradoxically enough, in foreign language education it is precisely the message which becomes primary once the medium is made available. The opportunity in an American setting, to hear and see the values of another culture, through the medium of a foreign language, reduces one's dependency on the homogenized media-messages of one's own culture. Set in France (or Switzerland, or the Congo, etc.) at least for a portion of one's day, thanks to radio and film, the francisant* achieves just that awareness of tradition, of man-in-time that Innis feared would be lost by the totalitarian uses of modern technology.

Obviously, then, the stakes are high in the fulfillment of the goals of Modern Foreign-language education. The intelligent reliance on modern technology is of primary importance not only for technically pedagogical reasons but, paradoxically enough, for the fulfillment of ancient and worthy goals of Humanistic education.

*Francisant is a term I have adopted to designate the second language learner who specializes in French language and French cultures.

III

Now, as is well known, of these three curricular areas, the least developed is in Civilization. At present, in American French Departments at the University level (and in those secondary programs permitting models along university lines), courses in civilization are usually found at the "base" of the program. "Civilization" thus stands somewhat in the same relation to the literary imperative as "language": both are "tools" or "skill areas" designed to make the study of literature more effective. Thus, it is often assumed that the literary specialist is himself the best teacher and, as necessary, scholar in the preparation and presentation of "language" and "civilization". The premise hardly flatters our colleagues in Linguistics and History, or the other "disciplines" whose subject matter and methodologies bear directly on "Civilization." Taken at its logical worst, the premise regards those disciplines as the handmaidens of literary studies and suggests that the literary specialist knows those areas better than their practitioners. But, this familiar Belletristic arrogance aside, the premise actually does a disservice to the serious study of both French Literature and French Culture, for it maintains the study of the interaction between literature and society at a rudimentary level, both substantively and methodologically. If we are to take both French Culture and the interaction between Literature and Culture seriously, we must (1) make the study of para-literary culture continuous throughout the curriculum and (2) place that study under the direction of colleagues whose primary interest is in such areas as History, Political Science, etc. Only in this way can we seriously claim to teach French culture.

I began with the truism that "French, as we all know, is the language of Culture." From what has preceded it is clear that for me, the truism is only of limited value. In reality, French is a language of Cultures and cultures. There are more than thirty French-speaking nations in the world. Not all, of course, use French as their only or their official language, but French does underlie their social, political and capital-c Cultural histories. It is time for departments of French to consider more than the capital-C dimensions of these histories. Even within those dimensions we have remained essentially print-oriented. Our curricula hereafter should include those parts of the total history of francophone cultures which are especially relevant to the careers our students project for themselves.

For a long while these careers will undoubtedly still be largely in the teaching field, with a continuing interest in capital-C Culture. Much of the teaching done at both secondary level and the college level presently is and will increasingly be to students who are themselves not specialists in French language and culture. Such students are interested in more than belles-lettres as a rule. Teachers of French must then be informed and trained in other areas of French culture--particularly, History, Fine Arts, daily life. Nevertheless, these areas also have intrinsic interest in themselves, that is, as areas not only in a "service" relation to other "majors," but as possible "major" areas themselves, both graduate and undergraduate. A Modern Department of French will look to the appointment of specialists in those areas to teach

courses in their specialty as regular offerings of the French Department.

This means that such appointees will be francophones. Now, on this score, the appointees need not be native-speakers or nationals of French-speaking nations. However, since we are breaking new ground here, it is most likely that the best source for such appointments will be French-speaking nations. In this connection, I have recommended that the University of Illinois establish an "Institut d'Etudes Françaises" within the Department of French at Urbana. This Institute would make appointments in much the same way that appointments are presently made in French and Comparative Literature. Members of this institute could be full-time or part-time, with their "home" in the French Department. Probably, we would need not more than five or six such members, one in each of the major areas indicated: History, one of the Social Sciences, Fine Arts, Literature, Music, the creative arts (writers, actors, etc.). In addition to these permanent members of the Institute, there would be a number of Associate Members coming either from other departments and educational units of the University at Urbana or on a visiting basis. Visiting Associates might be invited for periods ranging from one month to one year. Salaries should be commensurate with the rank held or granted at the time of appointment. Seven or eight of these teachers would constitute an Advisory and Curriculum Committee, chaired by the Director of the Institute. (Approximately one half of this Committee should be made up of members of Departments other than French.)

Members of this Institute should offer courses and/or research projects conducted on a participatory basis with students and/or colleagues. Certainly, one of the major activities of the "Institut" would be in "continuing" and "expanded" education (recyclage). The very narrowness of education in French over the past four decades suggests that not only the contemporary student but many of his teachers--including the most distinguished--will feel the need to expand his horizons through the offerings of the "Institut." These offerings should be presented with as much flexibility as possible. Many of them would be projects--"travaux pratiques" rather than "cours"--in which instructor and students would work collaboratively on the problem of updating knowledge in a given part of the field of French studies. Other offerings might be presented within conventional (not a dirty word) framework: lectures, small seminars, exposés, term papers, etc. Especially in the area of History--and more especially in the History of francophone countries other than France--there will be a mix of "approaches": courses with lectures, seminars, travaux pratiques, etc. Moreover, these areas might last for longer periods than others--one or two semesters, for example.

In addition to serving the increasing needs of recyclage, the curriculum in Civilization should, to a greater degree than the other curricula, prepare candidates for non-academic professional careers. At this point I call attention to (1) June Lowry Sherif's Handbook of Foreign Language Occupations (Regents Publishing Co., Division of Simon and Shuster 1966); (2) 1966 Northeast Conference

Reports, "Wider Horizons in Foreign Language Teaching"; and (3) Northeast Conference Reports 1970, "Motivation"--especially Section CC.

IV

"Civilisation" is the most exciting and potentially most fruitful area of curriculum development. At the University of Illinois (Urbana) I have already taken some initiatives in the area. These initiatives have led (a) to a planning meeting in March 1970 with some twenty colleagues representing more than twelve departments at Urbana; (2) my official trip (May 1970) to French-speaking countries to explore patterns of cooperation in this connection; (3) unofficial cross-listing of offerings in our own and other departments (attached). Some idea of the kinds of offerings for this curriculum can be drawn from a good many of the courses listed in our recent unofficial cross-listing in connection with the concept of an "Institut d'Etudes françaises" on this campus.[1] (Undoubtedly, in the area of recyclage the offerings would be still more varied and "unconventional"). Next year, through still more frequent and formal contacts with colleagues here, throughout the state and abroad, we will have an even greater sense of program in this area. In this connection, looking to "foreign-relations", the French Department at Illinois-Urbana, as the Department of French in the principal university of Illinois system of Higher Education, might serve as a focus for all state activities in this curriculum.

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1 See Appendix to this article.

Many of these matters deal with curricula at an advanced level or with para-curricular educational activities at that level. This level has been neglected for far too long by foreign-language specialists. Now, according to one school of thought, too many of the resources in foreign-language education already go to the "advanced levels" particularly in salaries for highly paid, narrow specialists who teach relatively few graduate students who are themselves budding specialists within the same narrow parameters. This is certainly worth investigating on a statistical basis. (We already know that at Illinois-Urbana 94 percent of all undergraduate students in French are "non-majors") However, at the same time we should investigate just how many of our total resources (physical plant, T.A. salaries and faculty salaries, etc.) go into the teaching of basic language courses--courses taken by those who might be called the "non-majors", that is, the high percentage of all foreign-language students who will not continue to use the language for serious intellectual or cultural purposes. Between these two "fringe groups" there lies a substantial number of neglected "achievers": the undergraduate majors and the first year graduate students, particularly those in teacher-preparation programs.

It is long past time for us to devote more of our professional energies and budgetary resources to these neglected "achievers". We need a natural allocation of resources at the college- and university-level. We cannot and should not continue to do the "tooling" tasks of the secondary school. (And we should certainly stop "re-tooling" in the case of students obviously poorly adapted

for foreign-language work). The facts of life--childhood, adolescence, maturity--as well as the concomitant structure of educational life--elementary, secondary, higher--dictate that colleges and universities deal largely with the application of already acquired foreign-language skills. If we do not concentrate on "things French" we have no raison d'être as a Department of French in the university. If we do not concentrate on "Frenchness" at the advanced stages, those assuming or assuring relative mastery of the language, then we have no raison d'être in an institution of higher education.

In this connection, the use of the French language is not merely some form of byzantine self-indulgence. We must indeed admit to the artificiality of using a foreign-language in a setting where all else goes on in English (including much of the private life of the francisant).[2] On the other hand, we must acknowledge the need to live this artificiality if we are to serve the needs of the great number of students who wish to have careers using French outside of teaching. Once again, I would note that modern technology--and, once again, especially the jet plane--makes the possibility of such careers extremely great: careers in international administration (both commercial and governmental), service industries (advertising, tourism), journalism and related editorial fields, entertainment (acting, producing, etc.) are both financially rewarding and spiritually satisfying. Let us not, from within the academy, bewail this direction of French studies as a damnable surrender to "relevance". In becoming literary scholars and critics, philologists and linguists, have we not ourselves responded to our own felt need for a personal

[2] ~~Francisant is a term I have adopted to designate the second language learner who specializes in French Language and French Cultures.~~

relevance? Therefore, as <u>francisants</u> should we not rather welcome the desire on the part of so many young people to maintain their love of "la francité" beyond the last semester hour and on the other side of the ivy-covered wall?

APPENDIX

A partial list of Courses in "things French" available to students (from all Departments) at the University of Illinois (Urbana-Champaign) during the Academic year 1970-1971:

APPENDIX

A partial list of courses in "things French" **available to students (from all departments) at the University of Illinois (Urbana) during the academic year 1970-1971:**

I. **Courses outside the French Department directly related to French and French speaking cultures**

ARCHITECTURE 314----------French Architecture
1500-1800
Prerequisite: Arch. 211 and 212, or Art 111 and 112
Three hours or one-half or one unit

ENGLISH 295----------Molière and the English Restoration Comedy of Manners
Three hours
A. Kaufman

HISTORY 271----------French Colonization of North America, 1500-1778
Three hours
Natalia Belting

HISTORY 310----------The Development of Modern Europe: French Revolution and Napoleon, 1789-1815
Three hours or one-half or one unit
J. B. Sirich

LINGUISTICS 316----------The Structure of the French Language
(Same as French 316)
Prerequisite: French 313
Three hours or three-fourt unit
Jenkins

MUSIC 169----------French Diction
One hour
Clark

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POLITICAL SCIENCE 336----------Government and Politics in Western Continental Europe (two-thirds of class devoted to French government)
Three hours or one unit
E. G. Lewis

II. General related courses

ANTHROPOLOGY 370----------Language, Culture, and Society

COMMUNICATIONS 370----------Three hours or one-half unit

LINGUISTICS 370----------Three hours or one-half unit

AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS 354----------Economic Development of Tropical Africa
Prerequisite: Econ. 103 or 108
Three hours or one-half or one unit

HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION 303----------Comparative Education
Two hours or one-half unit

III. 400 Level courses

COMMUNICATIONS/RADIO-TV 477----------World Broadcasting
Prerequisite: Comm/R-TV 462
One unit
Spring semester
Douglass

POLITICAL SCIENCE/COMMUNICATIONS 477----International Communications
One unit
Osgood, Schiller, Merritt

IV. Courses within the French Department of interest to non-French majors

FRENCH 255----------Introduction to French Literature in Translation, I
(Same as Humanities 255)
Non-French majors only
Four hours
B. Bowan

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FRENCH 335----------French Civilization, I
Prerequisite: French 201 and 202
Three hours or three-fourth unit
Mainous

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